



Cato Manor, 1960

## Expropriation

In the first of the two vivid chapters 26 and 27 on primitive accumulation (attached), Karl Marx describes what is required to be in place before the system of surplus value can start pumping, and reproducing itself.

As Marx says, the myths around this origin are many, but the truth is written in blood and fire, the ruin of the feudal system, and the destruction of the semi-feudal, semi-bourgeois guilds in the towns of Western Europe.

These revolutions made possible the existence of “free labourers”, which is to say people with no means of production or subsistence, who must sell their only possession – their labour power – in order to survive from day to day. These are the working proletariat.

According to Marx, the capitalistic era began in the 16th century, but he does not say that capitalism was dominant or hegemonic at that time. Many of the bourgeois institutions that are nowadays taken as part of capitalism, such as double-entry book-keeping, banks, stock and bond markets, insurance, contract law and global freight navigation, were first developed under late feudalism, but especially in the 17th century, in the service of the big, bourgeois, transcontinental business of slavery, which is very different from capitalism.

How the “free labourers” historically came into existence is exemplified in the second of the two chapters, where Marx takes the “classic form” of this process as being that of England, starting from the 16th Century (i.e. 1501 to 1600). Clearly, the creation of the proletariat was contemporary with the slave trade, while the latter was dominant. Capitalism only began to supersede and to actively suppress slavery after it had matured during the period 1500 to 1800, or in other words, not until after the “industrial revolution” of the late 18th Century, in England and in Scotland.

The process of eviction of people from the land is popularly known in England as “the enclosures” and in Scotland as the “Highland clearances”. To South Africans, one can say that the book describes processes of dispossession that are familiar even up to the present time. In the case of the Highlands of Scotland, one can also read that game parks (called deer forests) were replacing settlements of people from two centuries ago. The same thing is happening today in South Africa under cover of “green ecology”, and not only with game

parks, but also with golf estates and horse-riding establishments.

With Chapter 27, it is not necessary to understand every local term, or to remember every local event. What is applicable still is the class struggle that underlay it all, the victorious bourgeoisie that came out on top, and the great, dispossessed, working proletariat that was left as the principal basis for capitalist extraction of surplus labour from then onwards - but also as capitalism's inevitable gravedigger.

**Picture**: Brutal force, as in Cato Manor, 1960, is what has enabled the expropriation of land.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Capital V1, C26, 27, Primitive Accumulation, Expropriation, Capital](#).
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